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# Kadafi: Disobeyed but Still Undeposed

By John K. Cooley

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With characteristic shrewdness, Libyan leader Moammar Kadafi stopped short of direct challenge to American and Western forces mobilized during last weekend's hijacking of the Egypt Air jet to Malta.

Kadafi tried to keep any possible Libyan involvement in the background. By so doing, he probably disappointed U.S. Navy pilots of the aircraft carrier Coral Sea's F-14 jets, standing by in Sigonella, Sicily; Britain's crack Special Air Services (SAS) regiment alerted at Hereford, England, and France's quick-reaction force readied at southern French bases, eager to avenge Kadafi's recent humiliations of the French military in Chad.

It seems certain that if Kadafi's military—aircraft, or infiltrated troops who came to Malta via a loose visa policy—had interfered with the airborne Egyptian rescue effort, the Western forces would have reacted and taken out the Libyan opposition. There would have been applause from most of Kadafi's North African neighbors, though it would have been nervous applause.

What Egypt's careful and phlegmatic President Hosni Mubarak does or doesn't do to Kadafi in reprisal depends on some variable and highly volatile factors. It also depends, of course, on whether Mubarak discovers solid proof of Kadafi's role in the terrorist act.

Many ordinary Egyptians may have been rightly outraged when they realized, rather late in the affair, that about 60 people died in the hijack rescue attempt and that Egyptian military proficiency was again being questioned. But many felt this was no reason to take it out on Kadafi. Foremost among them would be some of Egypt's Muslim fundamentalists. In 1980, they assassinated President Anwar Sadat for doing what Kadafi and radical Palestinians now accuse Mubarak of: selling out to U.S. financial and military aid to keep what they see as a dishonorable peace with Israel.

This is happening, the militants feel, amid an increasingly anti-American Arab political world, an Arab world that Mubarak and most other Egyptians aspire to rejoin, provided Cairo can do so on its own terms.

Less understood, but equally critical in any Libyan conflict with a Western-supported Egypt, is Kadafi's own troubled domestic situation.

Lybia suffers from falling oil revenues (only about $9 billion this year as opposed to $20 billion five years ago). Lybia has expelled more than 50,000 Tunisians, Egyptians and other foreigners who did much of the country's menial work. Unrest has spread from citizens weary of food and goods shortages—caused by the poor administration of Kadafi's willy-nilly style of rule-by-committee—right into the regular armed forces.

Kadafi does not trust his own officers and frequently scolds them in public.

Even senior echelons of Kadafi's security forces, trained by East German advisers, have been affected by the growing discontent. According to Kadafi's opponents, as the hijack drama unfolded in Malta last Sunday, Col. Hassan Eshqal, Kadafi's cousin and senior security aide, died in a strange "accident." So did another security official, both in Kadafi's home region of Sirte on Libya's Mediterranean coast.

The two important victims were driving in separate cars at high speeds when either their brakes or rear axles failed—sabotaged, according to the opposition. This is the latest among persistent tales of foul play and dissention in Kadafi's security services, where senior officers have thwarted many past plots and conspiracies against Kadafi.

Arab analysts of Lybia's 16-year-old regime, and its 12-year-long confrontation with Egypt, believe Mubarak would not commit military forces against Kadafi—as Sadat did in a bloody but inconclusive four-day desert campaign in July, 1977—without some clear new act of Lybian aggression.

"This is unlikely," says a supporter of Muhammad Yusuf Magarief, a former ambassador and auditor-general of Libya, who is Kadafi's most serious Libyan opponent. "Kadafi knows his regular army, air force and navy won't obey orders for any new foolish adventure, after the disastrous setbacks of the past in Uganda, Chad and elsewhere."

(Anwar Sadat's own memoirs allege a failed 1972 Kadafi adventure: Probably doubtful of his own fledgling submarine force, Kadafi ordered an Egyptian submarine captain, then in a Libyan port, to torpedo and sink the British luxury liner Queen Elizabeth II, carrying passengers on a gala cruise to Israel. The order went unheeded.)

Then, last September, during the crisis over expulsions of Tunisian workers, the Libyan opposition claims that Kadafi ordered raids by his commando units and air force against Tunisia and possibly Egypt. Senior officers refused. Security units crushed the mutiny, but Kadafi's orders were not obeyed.

Israel and the United States, say North African observers, have done Kadafi two big favors lately. One was Israel's air raid on the Palestine Liberation Organization headquarters outside Tunis on Oct. 1. Justified Tunisian fears of Kadafi, so carefully encouraged by the United States, were immediately forgotten. They were replaced, overnight, by an anti-Americanism not seen in Tunisia since the United States helped the small state to emerge from French rule and influence in the 1950s.

The second favor, say Kadafi's adversaries, one that has made it more difficult for Mubarak to act now, was a recent Robert Woodward story in the Washington Post. It described a supposed Reagan Administration plan, to be carried out by the CIA, for "destabilising" Kadafi, using hostile neighbors such as Egypt.

Since then, the Libyan media have kept up a shrill crescendo about "CIA and Zionist plots" against Kadafi, glorifying him as an Arab champion.

"We want to get rid of Kadafi, all right," say his Libyan enemies, "but we have to do this ourselves and in our own way. CIA involvement, or talk about it—especially talk about it—is a poisoned gift: good news for Kadafi; very bad news for us." □

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